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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines various aspects of the Learning Improvement Group (LIG). The LIG is described as a model for organizing existing resources to meet basic skills needs of students. Reference is also made to the identification of both student and teacher reading/learning needs in self-renewing schools. Suggestions are made regarding the organization and assessment of LIG. Various assessment approaches and specific assessment strategies are described. Taken into consideration is the time required for these assessment procedures and the individuals who would be best suited for making the assessments. Also discussed are the budget needs of an LIG and its role in curriculum development. Sample forms that teachers would be asked to complete in analyzing student needs and their own teaching styles are included. (EB)

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An Approach to Basic Skills Improvement in the Departmentalized School.*

MAY 4 - 1979

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This is the era of the Chevette, Pinto and Rabbit. For more and more people such cars are the answer to necessary transportation needs. Some public schools have always met their basic skills needs with similarly inexpensive methods. Recently, many schools have either decided or been asked to reduce staff and course offerings. Funds available for meeting student needs in new ways or even old ways have been cut or don't go as far due to inflationary effects. A shot-gun approach to needs is now rarely possible. Administrators now take their limited venture funds, select one critical need and try to achieve their objectives.

Looking forward toward the 21st. Century common sense and evidence indicate that these austere conditions will not change for many schools. Additional reductions in experimental funds can be expected. Declining enrollments will add strength to budget cutting forces. Some schools will decrease in size and others will close.

Within a global perspective the American economy is paying more for essential minerals, energy and agricultural raw materials. Once favorable terms of trade have changed. The American standard of living and level of expectations will cost more to sustain. These factors when added to inflation and a reduced birth rate will make raising public funds for new programs a difficult and discouraging process. Getting money will still be possible but it will not happen as often. Schools will become like departments buying new textbooks. One will only be able to go to the well every five years.

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*For the objectives of this essay "basic skills" is narrowly defined as reading and visual information processing. The model and concepts this essay projects may be extended to writing and mathematical skills.

A rapidly changing job market will lead to demands for post-secondary publically funded education. The certain growth of a larger senior citizen population will inevitably redistribute some percentage of the general social service budget toward meeting the needs of these citizens. For public education the era of getting along with less has just started.

Yet, schools must continue to meet changing student basic skills needs. State legislatures and Boards of Education are directing more attention toward basic skills within departmentalized schools. The means to meet these needs will have to come from human and other resources already within the schools. Less and less reliance will be placed upon commercial programs and services.

Some schools and districts have had their internal capacity to meet needs reduced or eliminated through the gradual squeezing cut of middle level curriculum leadership positions. One is either a line administrator or a classroom teacher in more and more districts. Self-renewing schools will have less resources to make the change from seeking help from the outside world to becoming self-reliant.

I. Organizing the LIG

The Learning Improvement Group (LIG) is a model to organize existing resources to meet basic skills needs of students. A LIG consists of staff and community members drawn from the following groups: Each major academic department, special services,

administration and parents. A LIG requires a coordinator selected from any professional group within a school. The objective of the LIG is to identify and service reading/learning needs using existing resources in a school. The LIG is not a curriculum development unit. Curriculum changes continue to be directed from within departments. A LIG's concern is with a school-wide basic skill which cuts across departments.

II. THE SELF-RENEWING SCHOOL IDENTIFYING STUDENT AND TEACHER READING/LEARNING NEEDS.

In departmentalized schools reading/learning needs are met by assessment within departments. Students attend courses within departments. In a certain sense students do not go to school. Rather, they attend a series of courses within departments. The school becomes a central service unit offering heat, light, discipline, food and recreation thus permitting the departments to operate. While this particular view may not be desirable or shared by some it does present one means of organizing change within departmentalized schools.

Assessment may be conducted by:

A. Informal discussion with departmental staff: The LIG coordinator and LIG representative from a particular department would seek opinions and comment. They are listening, analyzing and writing.

B. A more formal, written assessment might be used. Teachers would be asked to complete an analysis of student needs and their own teaching styles. A copy of these forms follows.

Identifying Student Needs

Name _____ Content Area _____

Please indicate your response in the proper column. Keep in mind that each skill is to be considered in relation to the subject matter content of your shop or classrooms. Because we are dealing with a language processing action, this survey does not relate solely to the printed page.

Respond on a scale 1-9 1-High Need 9-Lowest Need,

A. PRINT COMPREHENSION SKILLS:

Is teaching your content material more difficult because some students are UNABLE TO:

1.	Obtain the main idea from a paragraph	___	___
2.	Formulate their own statements from reading.....	___	___
3.	Arrange and organize ideas.....	___	___
4.	Skim a selection for information	___	___
5.	Read and understand problems	___	___
6.	Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant details.....	___	___
7.	Draw valid inferences.....	___	___
8.	Visualize situations.....	___	___
9.	Adjust reading speed to the content.....	___	___

B. LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND OBSERVATION SKILLS:

Are students making the teaching of your content area more difficult because they are UNABLE to complete a task whenever you speak to them as a class and:

1.	Give directions.....	___	___
2.	Explain a process.....	___	___
3.	Detail a step-by-step procedure.....	___	___
4.	Describe something.....	___	___
5.	Interpret relationships.....	___	___
6.	Evaluate an event or outcome.....	___	___

LEARNING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

C. VISUAL COMPREHENSION:

When using printed visuals such as CARTOONS,CHARTS, PICTURES, MAPS, DIAGRAMS, STATISTICS, ETC., and electronic media such as FILM, SLIDES, FILM STRIPS, TRANSPARANCIES, ETC., do you find that students are UNABLE TO:

1. Find the main idea expressed by the visual..... ___ ___
2. Formulate their own statements..... ___ ___
3. Arrange and organize ideas..... ___ ___
4. Extract just the most important information..... ___ ___
5. Recognize and understand any problems which may be posed by the visual..... ___ ___
6. Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant details..... ___ ___
7. Draw valid inferences..... ___ ___
8. Adjust their exposure/reading time of the visual to its difficulty..... ___ ___

D. VOCABULARY SKILLS LEADING TO CONCEPT UNDERSTANDING:

Is teaching your content material more difficult because some students are UNABLE TO:

1. Recognize and understand the vocabulary of the subject area ___ ___
2. Recognize and understand the different meanings of familiar words when used in different contexts..... ___ ___
3. Recognize and understand operational symbols, variables... ___ ___
4. Pronounce words..... ___ ___
5. Determine the correct meaning of words..... ___ ___
6. Use sentence pattern/context clues..... ___ ___

LEARNING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

E. QUESTIONING STRATEGIES LEADING TO CONCEPT UNDERSTANDING:

Do students in your content area have difficulty understanding and answering questions WHICH ARE:

1. Literal..... ___ ___
2. Interpretive..... ___ ___
3. Evaluative ..... ___ ___

OR REQUIRE MAKING:

4. Identification..... ___ ___
5. Relationships..... ___ ___
6. Analysis..... ___ ___
7. Applications..... ___ ___
8. Personalization..... ___ ___

F. INFORMATION RETRIEVAL SKILLS:

Would the teaching or your content area be easier and more successful if students WERE BETTER EQUIPPED TO:

1. Read and follow directions correctly..... ___ ___
2. Use a variety of references for research reading..... ___ ___
3. Recognize the purpose for their assignments..... ___ ___
4. Take notes or make outlines..... ___ ___

When students use their texts, are they able to USE AND UNDERSTAND:

5. Index..... ___ ___
6. Glossary..... ___ ___
7. Table of Contents..... ___ ___
8. Appendix..... ___ ___
9. Chapter Headings..... ___ ___
10. Underlined or Italicized words..... ___ ___
11. Summary Paragraphs or different colored paragraphs within the selection..... ___ ___

LEARNING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

G. ASSIGNMENT MAKING:

Do you find, when having made assignments, that students exhibit any of the following:

1. Readily understand the task..... ___ ___
2. Show preparedness the following day..... ___ ___
3. Frequently return with incomplete assignments..... ___ ___
4. Develop a greater interest in the subject area..... ___ ___

Of the four "broad" areas, as presented in this survey, please circle the two which YOU feel are the most important to YOU in relation to YOUR students and YOUR content area.

A. Print Comprehension and Vocabulary Concept Development.

B. Listening Comprehension and Observation Skills.

C. Visual Comprehension and Questioning Strategies Leading to Concept Understanding.

D. Information Retrieval Skills and Assignment Making.

Finally, please indicate by circling the correct word if you think you would like to participate in this program this coming school year. Those individuals participating will immediately receive classroom techniques designed to help them focus on language processing skills applicable to his/her content area.

THANK YOU.

LIG Representative
Department

Identifying Teacher NEEDS.

What Materials Do You Use When Teaching?

8.

How Often:
(Write comments weekly, daily, bi-weekly)

Please comment. Do you Need Teaching Ideas?
1-High need 5-Low need.

I. PRINTED WORDS

- text chapters -
- newspapers -
- magazines -

II. TEXT VISUALS OR SUPPLEMENTAL

- maps -
- charts/graphs -
- cartoons -
- pictures/photographs -
- models -

III. ELECTRONIC MEDIA

- film strips -
- film strips/record -
- slides -
- transparencies/lecture -
- film loops -
- tv -
- film -

IV PEOPLE AND EVENTS

- field trips -
- speakers -
- lab exercises

V OTHER MATERIALS UNIQUE TO YOUR CLASS

A few more ideas. Please comment

1. Do you assign readings within class or as homework?
2. Do you assign work using electronic media outside the classroom?
3. Do you use TV shows as part of your units?

THANKS.

Assessment might be made in one department or in all major departments. Schools trying to improve basic skills might focus on one grade's major departments or on a subject in three or four grades. Don't try to do too much at once with a new idea.

In a departmentalized middle school grades 6-8 the sixth grade is the most appropriate to assess. In a junior high school grades 7-9 the seventh grade should bethe target grade. In a high school grades 9-12 the ninth grade would assessed.

The choice of these three "entry " grades to the departmentalized school is logical since these grades offer courses which prepare a student for success in subsequent years.

Asssessment materials are returned to the department's LIG-Representative and analyzed by the LIG-Coordinator. Ideas, materials and other resources would then be directed toward particular teachers in specific departments.

Needs assessment can be done before school begins. Information would then establish an in-service pattern for the year. Assessment should be done following each report period. Classes with severe failure rates would become the target for the LIG-Representative, LIG Coordinator and other LIG Representatives from other departments whose courses contain these same students. Assessment can also be done at any time a department, a teacher or administrator might request the action.

In the LIG concept assessment is made by a subject teacher (the LIG-representative) to a teaching peer. A science person works with another science teacher. They know one another, share similar concerns

and have similar backgrounds.

III. Meeting Learning/Reading Needs

A. The first effort to service a teacher's need is by the LIG REPS in a department. The diagram on page 10B indicates 4 ways by which services may be delivered. The assumption that fellow academic department members are best qualified to meet academic needs is basic to the LIG process.

B. The school-wide LIG meets on a scheduled, regular basis. Once a month following departmental meetings is an advantageous time.

Prior to the meeting, all departmental needs assessments are given to the LIG coordinator. Time is needed to organize a workshop for LIG REPS, research literature or ask school faculty for help in meeting a school-wide need.

The LIG coordinator might call teachers in neighboring schools for advice.* They might be invited to speak to the entire LIG, or be asked to offer aid to one department or one teacher. Thus, a telephone call might solve a problem for a teacher.

The LIG strategy assumes that very limited funds are available for paid consultants. The strategy uses existing resources within a school or peer resources in other schools to meet a need. Every major department has one staff member responsible for learning self-renewal. Responsibility for change is decentralized to an instructional level.

*Middle and High Schools receive students from "sending" school. Teach ers on the "receiving" end rarely know or meet a student's previous teacher. A LIG Coordinator would establish horizontal links between teachers in different schools. Communication would be established between a 9th grade teacher and an 8th grade teacher in another school who taught student the previous year.

LEARNING IMPROVEMENT GROUP SERVICES.

TYPE I

Peer within department

to

A trained content teacher has time each day to offer ideas in learning improvement to other department members.

Peer within department

TYPE II

Often students do well in one subject and poorly in another. A problem in English might be solved by learning about the student's work and learning styles in another department.

LIG-Representative in Another Department (Science)

to

LIG-Representative in Different Department (English)

to

English Teacher

TYPE III

LIG-Coordinator

to

If a social studies representative to the LIG needs help he would use the LIG-C. The LIG-C might contact other schools, curriculum centers or any other potentially useful outside source of information.

LIG-Representative (Social Studies)

to

Teacher (Social Studies)

TYPE IV

LIG-Sponsored Workshop for the Entire Faculty or Faculty of a Single Department

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Notes: The LIG's work is concerned with learning processes. These may be defined as motivation, writing improvement, reading improvement, matching learning styles with teaching styles and improving mathematics through the non-math. content areas.

LIG's have no direct concern with course content, supervision or evaluation of teachers.

After a full LIG meeting, the LIG REPS from each department carry back possible solutions to their fellow department members. These suggestions might be communicated at a regular department meeting or on an informal basis to individuals or small groups. Published teacher ideas or magazine articles could be distributed.

The LIG ~~aides~~ REPS would regularly assess departmental learning needs. Teachers within a department would be encouraged to bring learning needs to the attention of the LIG REP. In this way the LIG concept is in action every day and isn't dependent on in-service days for time to meet student learning needs. Teachers within a department use one another to meet their needs. Teachers in different departments support each other through REPS, or the total LIG. Schools with LIG's support other schools both within one district or outside a single district.

C. The LIG coordinator may also service learning needs specific to a department or a single teacher. The services are not dependent on a LIG meeting. The LIG coordinator might contact a LIG REP in the English department to assist the math department LIG REP.

SUMMARY:

A learning need may be met by asking these questions.

1. Assessment by LIG REP within a department
2. Is the solution within our Department?
3. Is the solution within other Departments in the school? LIG REP contacts other LIG REP.
4. Is the solution in another school? LIG REP or LIG-C contact peers in neighboring schools.

5. Do we need a special effort by the LIG-C to aid our department?

6. Is the need school-wide requiring the LIG to organize a workshop for all LIG-REPS.

7. Do we need an "outside expert?" ++

A LIG-coordinator should be responsible to bring assistance from State agencies, professional educational groups and national research groups.

Often consultants are cost free or inexpensive. But unless their use is carefully related to a self-reliance objective, they can continue a school's dependency on outsiders for self-renewal.

If an outside consultant is needed, a school's self-reliance will only marginally be affected if - -

1. The consultant uses existing school materials to demonstate a solution to learning needs. Materials externally developed are costly and may require staff training.

2. The consultant should train one staff member prior to the workshop to give part of the workshop. Maintenance of the consultant's program is improved by including local staff.

3. The consultant should be willing to return to a school after a workshop, meet with staff and students and, if needed, work with teachers in a classroom situation.

IV-A Scheduling Time for LIG staff in the Self-Renewing School

The LIG REP need time to assess needs and service them within a department, by involving staff from other departments or by using the LIG coordinator. The REP should have a minimum of two periods a week for this work. One period might be used for needs assessment and the other to set up solutions to a given learning problem.

++ A recent study conducted by the University of Southern California reported in the September, 1975 issue of Phi Delta Kappan indicated that teachers are most likely to use ideas and techniques presented by experienced teachers in preference to any other kind of professional advice.

The LIG-C needs time each day to organize the school-wide LIG activities and to maintain communications and services to individual LIG REPS in the departments. A minimum of 5 periods a week are required.

The school-wide LIG needs regularly scheduled time to meet to discuss solutions to school-wide learning problems. This may be done during in-service days. In-service days and programs should be flexible enough to permit LIG members to function both within their departments and as a LIG member.

B. LIG REPS and the LIG Coordinator: Personnel Selection

REPS should be teachers actively interested in the learning process and learning styles as they apply to their content area. They don't have to be recognized curriculum leaders or the most knowledgeable in their department speciality. They should be identified as the department member most concerned with the learning process and student psychological development.

The LIG-C should be the learning leader of the school. The person might be a teacher from a department, a special services unit or an administrator with time to efficiently service learning needs of every teacher, department and special services group in a school.

Funding the LIG

While a LIG is designed to achieve school self-renewal by using in-house resources, a small budget will be needed to deliver services, such as:

A. Reproduction of articles or research reports.

B. Mimeographing, mailing and general supplies.

C. The "outside" consultant: The "outsider" should be used only after all available internal resources and resources

in neighboring cooperating districts have been exhausted.

Using the LIG budget for a consultant is a decision taken by all affected LIG members.

The LIG budget should be separate from an administrators in-serive or consultancy line-item. The LIG should be presented to a Board of Education as a separate school service. Care must be taken to show that the LIG isn't a part of special education. It is designed to improve the learning efficiency of all students. It must not be operated or perceived as a remedial program although it might be able to draw resources from Federal or State programs.

V. The LIG and Curriculum Development (C/D)

Curriculum Development remains the responsibility of academic departments. A LIG REP or LIG-C will be an available resource for curriculum development planners. A LIG-C might attend department curriculum development planning meetings as an observer or consultant. A LIG-REP or LIG-Coordinator might be asked by a department to research materials to meet a particular learning need.

The LIG-REP and LIG-Coordinator could be asked to assist the curriculum development team in identifying and introducing alternative forms of instruction, class space use or materials permitting an individualized approach to learner styles. Academic departments should view the LIG-REP, LIG-Coordinator and LIG as resources to enable them to meet a department's content-defined needs.

The LIG encourages self-contained deparments within a school to communicate and cooperate with one another to service learning needs common to students. Since students cross department lines and carry learning needs and successes, a staff in a school needs to also

communicate across department lines.

Schools and Less Developed Countries: An Attempt at an Analogy:

Following are excerpts from a political document adopted in 1967 as national policy by the major political party and Government of Tanzania, a state in East Africa. The policies emphasize the need for:

National self-reliance
self-renewal
self-direction

and the elimination of policies that require:

money
foreign aid
outside experts

producing national dependency and reducing self-reliance.

The policy suggests a rationale by which schools may organize to reduce their dependency on shrinking resources and to increase their internal self-reliance.

DO NOT LET US DEPEND UPON MONEY FOR DEVELOPMENT

It is stupid to rely on money as the major instrument of development when we know only too well that our country is poor. It is equally stupid, indeed it is even more stupid, for us to imagine that we shall rid ourselves of our poverty through foreign financial assistance rather than our own financial resources. It is stupid for two reasons.

Firstly, we shall not get the money. It is true that there are countries which can, and which would like to help us. But there is no country in the world which is prepared to give us gifts or loans, or establish industries, to the extent that we would be able to achieve all our development targets. There are many needy countries in the world.

> And even if all the prosperous nations were willing to help the needy countries, the assistance would still not suffice. But prosperous nations are not willing to give all they could. Even in these prosperous nations, the rich do not willingly give money to the Government to relieve want.
>
> GIFTS AND LOANS WILL ENDANGER OUR INDEPENDENCE
>
> Secondly, even if it were possible for us to get enough money for our needs from external sources, is this what we really want? Independence means self-reliance. Independence cannot be real if a Nation depends upon gifts and loans from another for its development. Even if there was a Nation, or Nations, prepared to give us all the money we need for our development, it would be improper for us to accept such assistance without asking ourselves how this would affect our independence and our very survival as a nation. Gifts which start off or stimulate our own efforts are useful gifts. But gifts which weaken our own efforts should not be accepted without asking ourselves a number of questions.
>
> In order to maintain our independence and our people's freedom we ought to be self-reliant in every possible way and avoid depending upon other countries for assistance. If every individual is self-reliant the ten-house cell will be self-reliant; if all the cells are self-reliant the whole ward will be self-reliant; and if the wards are self-reliant the District will be self-reliant. If the Districts are self-reliant, then the Region is self-reliant, and if the Regions are self-reliant, then the whole Nation is self-reliant and this is our aim.

Transposed to an American public education setting these political concepts suggest a strategy by which schools can seek self-renewal through self-reliance. Creating a Learning Improvement Group (LIG) is a mechanism to achieve the objective of improving reading and learning through self-help.